Semja
Southeastern Michigan
Jazz Association
Update
November 2025

Kenji Lee's Elmo Hope Quartet at the Blue LLama

BY LARS BJORN AND PIOTR MICHALOWSKI

On a chilly Wednesday in October, we visited the Blue LLama in Ann Arbor to hear the second set of saxophonist Kenji Lee and drummer Pete Siers's new project celebrating the compositions of the hard bop pioneer pianist Elmo Hope, in a quartet with Andrew Bishop on tenor and soprano saxes and Andy Peck on bass.

Born and raised in New York, Hope grew up with Bud Powell and early on befriended Thelonious Monk but following a stint in the army and a decade playing mainly in rhythm and blues bands, he began to make his mark in jazz at age thirty, when he made his first recordings in 1953 and 1954. With one exception, the tunes of the night came from this early period.

The band opened with "Bellarosa," perhaps Hope's best-known composition, based on the harmonies of "I Got Rhythm." From the first moments, they were cooking, with Siers pushing hard, bringing to mind the controlled assertive drive of Roy Brooks, working perfectly in tandem with Peck's powerful big-toned bass. The two tenor saxophonists explored the familiar changes with customary ease, finding new details in different ways, their well-developed beautiful rich tones blending well but also providing some good juxtaposition as Lee prefers a bit more of an edge in his sound than does his former teacher. This was ever so much more evident to good effect when both reached for the soprano saxophones. The choice of tunes provided good contrasts, including a medium tempo "Stars over Marrakesh," a tender ballad "Eyes so Beautiful as Yours," and the faster "Abdullah" that featured a wonderfully melodic solo by Siers. The evening ended with the exuberant minor key "Crazy."

It was gratifying to hear Hope's music being kept alive and to be reminded of his unique compositional contributions to the music. The piano-less quartet played the often-intricate melodies with inspired ease, and the soloing was exceptional by all. The occasion was a nice one as it was Lee's birthday, made special by the presence of bassist Ron Brooks, whose contributions to the jazz scene in downtown Ann Arbor are legion, including running his wonderful Bird of Paradise jazz club, where for many years the house Ron Brooks Trio included Peter Siers on drums. And, of course, Ron was one of the founding members of SEMJA.

Speaking OUT Edgefest 29

BY LARS BJORN

This year's Edgefest was an artistic and popular success with a large turnout every night. Once again the team that put this together over the past year deserves tremendous applause. Executive artistic director Deanna Relyea, Edgefest coordinator Kenji Lee, Piotr Michalowski and the staff of Kerrytown Concert House, pulled out all the stops to assemble a fantastic group of artists for this year's Edgefest. KCH has always been the central location of the event, but now there were no rival venues. There were many high points, but let me focus on a few of them.

edgefest29 2025
SPEAKING OUT

On Wednesday, saxophonist Dave Rempis headed the Truss Quartet from Chicago, with Pandelis Karayorgis on piano. Rempis' alto was forceful and moving, and he was backed very nicely by the rhythm section. Another reedman, Marty Ehrlich, was the leader of Air Legacy celebrating the pathbreaking Air Trio, which I heard some years ago at U-M.

Thursday, Ben Miller's 11th hour quartet drew on other prominent Ann Arbor musicians, which is not surprising since Miller was born here. Miller used a conventional sax mouthpiece and one for a trumpet, creating some very interesting sounds. Miller also used Marlena Boedigheimer for some impressive two-sax passages. The marvelous drummer Jonathan Barahal Taylor always floors me with his relaxed timing and finesse.

Violinist/violist Jason Kao Hwang was an absolute virtuoso in doing soliloquies. He started out playing pizzicato, then shifted to bowing his instrument, creating a powerful if not unexpected transition. Hwang has become a regular at Edgefest and we should be grateful for his startling creativity each year. The same could be said of pianist Myra Melford. This time with her Splash trio she played with Michael Formanek's powerful bass and Ches Smith on drums and vibes.

Friday featured the duo of brass man Taylor Ho Bynum and bassist Ken Filiano for an opener — both well known to Edgefest afficionados. They have played together for decades, which shows in their easy rapport. Bynum stole kitchen items and a CD as mutes, which produced haunting sounds and bounced off Filiano's emotive playing. They were followed by a tight Detroit/Chicago quartet: pianist Mike Malis, violinist Caroline Jesalva, percussionist Adam Shead and saxophonist Salim Washington. Detroiter and baritone saxophonist Alex Harding made up another duo with pianist Lucian Ban. Harding takes no prisoners with his forceful approach to the big sax and is always a joy to listen to. Friday closed with Ellen Christi and FLUX IN CHAOS, a most unusual dance performance since Patricia Nicholson was on KCH's relatively small stage. It nevertheless worked out nicely as the dance was accompanied by the great William Parker on bass and Michael TA Thompson on drums.

Saturday led off with the usual Edgefest parade through the Kerrytown Market area. Many thanks should be extended to Caroline Fitzgerald and her students at Scarlett Middle School who provided the music for the parade. Tenorist Andrew Bishop visited Scarlett to train the students in Coltrane's "A Love Supreme," which is always the theme for this occasion.

The afternoon's music featured pianist and Detroiter Kenny Green and his collective with yet another powerful saxophonist Hanah Jon Taylor. Veteran pianist Marilyn Crispell showed her prowess in a solo performance and altoist Darius Jones' soaring tone was striking with his trio.

The evening led off with Detroit born violinist Gwen Laster and violist Melanie Dyer in a quartet setting with percussionist Andrew Drury. Jason Kao Hwang's Edge celebrated their 20th anniversary in a blowout performance which included Bynum, Relyea on vocals, Michalowski on saxophones, Ken Filiano and Andrew Drury. It was a fabulous end to one of the best Edgefests in memory!

photographs by Lars Bjorn

A2 Jazz Fest

BY IRA LAX AND JEFF GAYNOR

The ninth annual A2 Jazz Fest was held on September 28 and 29 at First Congregational Church and The Raven's Club in downtown Ann Arbor. There was no charge to anyone attending, but donations were accepted and a portion of the profits from a food and an aroma oil vendor went to the festival. A2JF continued its commitment to educating and supporting young jazz enthusiasts with workshops for middle and high school students on Saturday with Sean Dobbins and Rob Bickley on Sunday. Learn more at *a2jazzfest.com.*

We saw the Dobbins session, and he is an inspired teacher to watch as he playfully prompts students to "pick two notes in the blues scale," echo and repeat. This exercise sets up a call-and-response rhythm to encourage listening to each other to create an active, unified sound. Quartet leader, bass player and Saturday performer, Laura-Simone lent her support. They used songs like "Moanin," "Caravan," and "C Jam Blues" by Duke Ellington. The two groups of a half dozen students were from Accent Pontiac (*accentpontiac.org*), led by Tia Harvey and Sarah Cracknell. Another piece of advice Dobbins passed along was "if you can sing it you can play it," as a way to generate ideas and have fun jamming at one another's homes on a weekend.

On Sunday Rob Bickley advised students from Ann Arbor Community High School, "move your attention around, and wait for something to move you," and "include the audience in the back of the room." The students looked like they really enjoyed working with the veteran musicians, even though they might have been a bit nervous. Dave Sharp and Anna Gersch produce this festival with education of young players as a prime focus.

After the student performances on Saturday afternoon, bassist Laura-Simone, who studies with Rodney Whitaker at MSU performed, followed by the Rick Roe Trio, featuring Whitaker and Ali Jackson. Sunday, prior to Theo Croker rocking an SRO audience, the Jeff Haas Quartet took the stage. Three pieces stood out: "Longetivity" [sic] began with a piano solo with long riffs up and down the keyboard, then transitioned into a broad pulsating rhythm throughout. Jeff explained that the title reflects the struggle that people are facing now. The next piece was "Tsuris" — a Yiddish word meaning trouble or worries — though Haas described it also as the courage being displayed in response. The last piece was called "Shakeed," referring to someone who's watching over you. Jeff's sense of humanity is clearly reflected in his music. His caring is also shown by the 30 years he's spent on the Building Bridges with Music program that have reached 700 schools, first in Detroit, and now in his home of Traverse City. Talking to him afterwards Haas told us, "Music is what ties us together. Right now it may be the only thing."

WEMU 89.1

The Choice for NPR…
news, jazz and blues.

Schedule

	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
5	**MORNING EDITION** NPR news, information, and public affairs Local news, traffic and weather with David Fair					**PUBJAZZ**	**PUBJAZZ**
6							
7							**REVEAL**
8						**WEEKEND EDITION** Scott Simon	**WEEKEND EDITION** Rachel Martin
9							
10	**89.1 JAZZ MORNING** Hosted by Michael Jewett					**THIS AMERICAN LIFE**	**SUNDAY BEST** Nik Thompson
11						**WAIT, WAIT… DON'T TELL ME!**	
12	**PUBJAZZ**					**TRAVEL** Rick Steves	
1						**FROM MEMPHIS TO MOTOWN** Wendy Wright	**GROOVEYARD** Daniel W. Long
2	**89.1 JAZZ AFTERNOON** Hosted by Michael Jewett						
3							**THE IN CROWD** Jessica Webster
4	**ALL THINGS CONSIDERED** NPR news, information & public affairs					**ROOTS MUSIC PROJECT** Jeremy Baldwin	
5							**BIG CITY BLUES CRUISE** Joe Tiboni
6							
7	**PUBJAZZ**				**REVEAL**	**CUBAN FANTASY** Marc Taras	**MOUNTAIN STAGE** Larry Groce
8					**ALL SONGS CONSIDERED**		
9					**ALT.LATINO**		**JAZZ NIGHT IN AMERICA**
10					**MOUNTAIN STAGE** Larry Groce		
11							
12							
1							
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3							
4							

National Public Radio
Eastern Michigan University

jazz events
November

						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30						

ATTENTION all venue owners, musicians, and listeners
Please let us know about upcoming jazz events in the area!

- Write us at SEMJA
  3020 Bolgos Circle
  Ann Arbor MI 48105
- Phone us at 734-668-7470
- Submit information online at *www.semja.org/submit*

We will include notices if they reach us by the 15th of the month prior to publication.

Aretha's Jazz Café at Music Hall

jazzcafedetroit.com
350 Madison
DETROIT 313-887-8500

NOVEMBER

3	7:00	Matt Matador Lemons: Tribute to Lenny White
7	7:00	Vladimir Cetkar
13	7:00	Uncommon Experiences
17	7:00	Tribute to Detroit Queens of Jazz
20	7:00	Detroit Jazz Factory

ONGOING

Sun	7:00	Aretha's Jazz Jam

Baker's Keyboard Lounge

theofficialbakerskeyboardlounge.com
20510 Livernois
DETROIT 313-345-6300

ONGOING

Fri	7:00	Ralphe Armstrong Trio – with Gerard Gibbs, Brandon Williams
Sat	7:00	Ralphe Armstrong Trio – with Gerard Gibbs, Brandon Williams

Ralphe Armstrong

Blue LLama Jazz Club

www.bluellamaclub.com
314 South Main St.
ANN ARBOR 734-372-3200

NOVEMBER

1	6:30	James Carter Organ Trio
2	5:00	James Carter Quintet: Lookin' at Lock
5	7:00	Jean Wilson and Friends
6	7:00	Charlie Hunter Trio
7	4:00	Paul Vornhagen
	7:00	Paxton/Spangler Band: CD Release Show
8	6:30	Brandon Woody
9	6:00	Naima Shambourger
12	7:00	Bobby Watson Group
14	7:00	Allen Denard
15	6:30	Sean Dobbins
	10:15	Annie Hayes Trio
19	6:00	Cyrus Chestnut
20	7:00	Bob Sweet Quartet
21	7:00	Dave McMurray
22	6:30	Alune Wade
26	7:00	Nate Topo Quartet – featuring Zania Alaké
28	7:00	Don Hicks & Friends
29	6:30	Demetrius Nabors
	10:15	Blou Reed
30	6:00	Organissimo – featuring Ron Blake

Cadieux Café

www.cadieuxcafe.com
4300 Cadieux Rd.
DETROIT 313-882-8560

NOVEMBER

30	4:00	Planet D Nonet

ONGOING

Thu	8:00	Bill Meyer Group – with Ibrahim Jones, Butter Hawkins

Cliff Bells

www.cliffbells.com
2030 Park Ave at West Adams
DETROIT 313-961-2543

NOVEMBER

1	7:30 9:30	Justin Dillard Organ Trio – featuring Bobby Broom
2	5:30 7:30	Justin Dillard Organ Trio – featuring Bobby Broom
6	7:30 9:30	Damon Terrell
8	7:30 9:30	De'Sean Jones
9	5:30 7:30	Jauron Perry Quintet
13	7:30 9:30	Alex White's New Covenant
14	7:30 9:30	Chris Codish Trio
15	7:30 9:30	Tariq Gardner's Evening Star
16	5:30 7:30	Tariq Gardner's Evening Star
20–22	7:30 9:30	Anthony Stanco Quartet
23	5:30 7:30	Re'Monda
28	7:30 9:30	William Hill III
29	7:30 9:30	Caleb Robinson and Reaching
30	5:30 7:30	Ambassadors Big Band

ONGOING

Wed	7:30 9:30	Russ Macklem's Detroit Quartet and Session

Common Grill

www.commongrill.com
112 South Main St.
CHELSEA (734) 475-0470

ONGOING

Tue	5:00	Rob Crozier Trio

Rob Crozier

Dirty Dog Jazz Café

www.dirtydogjazz.com
97 Kercheval
GROSSE PTE. FARMS 313-882-5299

ONGOING

Wed	6:30	Michael Zaporski

NOVEMBER

1	6:30	Lady Vonne

Michael Zaporski

The Earle

www.theearle.com
121 West Washington St.
ANN ARBOR 734-994-0211

ONGOING

Tue	7:00	Jake Reichbart
Wed	7:00	Jake Reichbart
Thu	7:00	Jake Reichbart
Fri	7:00	Jazz Trio
Sat	7:00	Jazz Trio

Elks Lodge #325
110 West Ann Arbor Trail
PLYMOUTH

ONGOING

Sat	6:00	Open Jam Session – with Pete Siers, Kenji Lee, Andy Peck, Max Bowen

Imaginate Restaurant
imaginaterestaurant.com
401 South Lafayette Ave.
ROYAL OAK 248-633-8899

ONGOING

Wed	6:30	Eat It Up Trio

Eat It Up Trio

Johnny's Royal Oak
johnnysroyaloak.com
215 South Main St.
ROYAL OAK 248-794-1261

ONGOING

Sun	6:30	Sheila Landis and Rick Matle

Sheila Landis & Rick Matle

Kerrytown Concert House
kerrytownconcerthouse.com
415 North Fourth Ave.
ANN ARBOR 734-769-2999

NOVEMBER

9	2:00	Ellen Rowe: All About the Trio
14	7:30	Alexander Zonjic & Friends
22	7:30	Evan Christopher

London Chop House
155 West Congress St.
DETROIT

ONGOING

Thu	7:30	Paul Keller, Paul King, Ralph Tope, Adam Mosley

Paul Keller

Lucille's Jazz Lounge
lucillesjazzlounge.com
1447 North Summit St., Suite C
TOLEDO, OH

NOVEMBER

1	7:15	James Gaiters & SoulRevival
7	7:15	Paul Keller Quintet
8	7:15	Allen Dennard Quintet
14	7:15	TruTone
15	7:15	Alonso Umana Quartet
22	7:15	Djangophonique
29	7:15	Nicole Heitger

Djangophonique

Mackenzie Hall
windsorjazzconcertseries.com
3277 Sandwich St.
WINDSOR, ONT

NOVEMBER

23	2:30	Evan Christopher

Schaver Music Recital Hall
480 West Hancock
DETROIT 48201

NOVEMBER

16	5:00	Music of George Bohanon

Shield's
25101 Telegraph Rd.
SOUTHFIELD

NOVEMBER

1	1:00	Jeff Trudell Big Band – featuring Bill Lymperis
15	1:00	Dave Bennett Quartet

Dave Bennett

Venue by 4M
experience4m.com
1919 South Industrial Hwy.
ANN ARBOR 734-800-0128

ONGOING

Sun	11 am	Jazz Sunday Brunch
Sat	7:00	Saturday Night Jazz

Weber's Habitat Lounge
www.thehabitatannarbor.com
3050 Jackson Rd.
ANN ARBOR 734-665-3636

ONGOING

Mon	6:00	Keaton Royer, Josef Deas
Tue	6:00	Keaton Royer, Josef Deas
Wed	6:00	Keaton Royer, Josef Deas
Thu	6:00	Keaton Royer, Josef Deas
Sun	5:00	William Marshall Bennett

William Marshall Bennett

Zal Gaz Grotto
zalgaz.org
2070 West Stadium Blvd.
ANN ARBOR 734-663-1202

ONGOING

Sun	5:00	Phil Ogilvie's Rhythm Kings
Mon	7:00	Paul Keller Orchestra
Tue	5:30	Paul Klinger's Easy Street Jazz Band

Upcoming Jazz Events

DECEMBER

4	Klezmephonic • Kerrytown Concert House, Ann Arbor
5	Endea Owens • Blue LLama Jazz Club Ann Arbor
5	David Janeway • Lucille's Jazz Lounge, Toledo
6	John Hill and The Soggy Bottom Big Band – with Dave Bennett & Olivia Van Goor • Shield's, Southfield
6	A Charlie Brown Christmas • Orchestra Hall, Detroit
7	Olivia Van Goor sings Ella Fitzgerald • Kerrytown Concert House, Ann Arbor
10	Paul Keller Christmas • Schoolcraft College, Livonia
12	Mr B and The Kerrytown Stompers • Kerrytown Concert House, Ann Arbor
14	Ellen Rowe All About the Trio • Kerrytown Concert House, Ann Arbor
20	Dave Tatrow Christmas Show • Shield's, Southfield
21	Maurice MOBETTA Brown • Blue LLama Jazz Club, Ann Arbor
27	Jean Holden • Lucille's 4th Anniversary Event, Toledo
31	New Year's Eve Early Bird – featuring Jerry McKenzie Just Jazz
31	New Year's Eve with Pete Siers • Kerrytown Concert House, Ann Arbor

JANUARY 2026

10	Ramona Collins • Shield's, Southfield
24	Olivia Van Goor with The Eat It Up Trio • Shield's, Southfield

FEBRUARY 2026

6–8	Caleb Wheeler Curtis • Orchestra Hall, Detroit

Southeastern Michigan Jazz Association

3020 Bolgos Circle
Ann Arbor, MI 48105

Organization
US Postage
PAID
Permit No. 240
Ann Arbor, MI

Membership

New

- Carol Beeman & Colleen Houlihan
- Betsy Kirksey
- Dennis A. MacDonald

Renew

- Mike Allemang
- Ron Bogdasarian
- Jeff Dunn
- Alan Goldsmith
- Gad Holland
- Ira Lax and Gari Stein
- William Lewis
- Maris LaPorta
- William Mathewson & Cheryl Cunningham

The Southeastern Michigan Jazz Association

(SEMJA) was formed in 1987 for the purpose of promoting understanding and appreciation of jazz as an art form. The organization is comprised of professional musicians, jazz scholars, jazz writers, club owners, broadcasters and listeners. The organization operates through a Board and with a volunteer staff.

SEMJA is a 501(c) (3) non-profit organization.

Inquiries

All mail should be sent to SEMJA,
3020 Bolgos Circle,
Ann Arbor, MI 48105
For phone messages
call: 734.668.7470
email: *semja@semja.org*

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SEMJA online

website: *www.semja.org*
social: *facebook.com/semja.org*

SEMJA Board Meeting

The SEMJA Board meets normally on the third Tuesday of the month at 6:30 p.m. The meeting on November 18 will be held online via video conferencing (Zoom). Please call Lars at 734-353-3568 if you have questions.

Board Members

Lars Bjorn, *President*
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Barton Polot, *Webmaster and Managing Editor*
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SEMJA Membership Application

Mail to: SEMJA • 3020 Bolgos Circle.
Ann Arbor, MI 48105

☐ New Member
☐ Renewal

Membership Levels

☐ Basic	$30
☐ Student	$20
☐ Couple	$40
☐ Patron	$60
☐ Nonprofit Corp.	$50
☐ Corporate	$250
☐ Lifetime	$500

Amount Enclosed $_____

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☐ Check payable to **SEMJA** ☐ Credit Card |__|__|__|__|__|__|__|__|__|__|__|__|__|__|__|__|

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